

OLYMPIC PROGRAM HELPS REFUGEES, DISPLACED PEOPLE WORLDWIDE

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WASHINGTON, AUGUST 19 - - The international sports community is reaching out to many of the world's 20 million refugees and internally displaced people in an effort to meet some of their basic needs and provide hope for a better future.

The Giving is Winning campaign brings together members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with the United Nations in encouraging athletes, officials and corporate partners to donate sports and casual clothing for distribution to refugee camps worldwide.

Already in 2007, the U.S. Olympic Committee is sending through the campaign more than 5,000 articles of sportswear, valued at more than \$124,000, to a refugee camp in Chad. The British Olympic Association sent clothing to Rwanda, which the IOC says has more than 49,000 refugees and 730 asylum seekers.

An official with the U.S. Olympic Committee told USINFO August 15 that its donation consists of excess athletic equipment that was ordered for outfitting U.S. Olympic athletes. The clothes include athletic shorts, pants, jackets, T-shirts, polo shirts and sleeveless vests.

In 2004, the U.S. Olympic Committee donated unused clothing and a variety of sports equipment such as volleyballs and volleyball nets to the Lukole refugee camp in Tanzania. More than 20,000 refugees, mostly young people, benefited from the contribution.

Peter Ueberroth, the U.S. Olympic Committee's chairman of the board, said in a July 6 statement that "one of the guiding principles of the worldwide Olympic movement is the spirit of giving, and we are proud to have the opportunity to contribute to this worthwhile" Giving is Winning campaign.

Giving is Winning is geared to the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, and aims to fill 10 large containers -- each more than six meters wide -- with the clothes. The IOC, which is spearheading the humanitarian effort with the United Nations, says the goal is to "bring a little joy to refugees through sport."

The first Giving is Winning campaign began with the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, and gathered nearly 30,000 articles of sports clothing.

In 2004, the campaign was conducted only during the actual games. Besides Tanzania, contributions went to Afghanistan, Eritrea, Kosovo and Azerbaijan.

The IOC says that because of the success in collecting clothes in Athens' Olympic Village in 2004, it wanted to begin the second Giving is Winning campaign much sooner -- this time in the one-year run-up to the Beijing Games, scheduled for August 8-24, 2008.

U.S.-BACKED ACTIVITIES

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) also is using sports to provide diversionary activities for at-risk youth. In Tanzania, for example, a USAID-backed program helped young people participate on football teams, which the agency said shifted the youngsters' attention away from such risky practices as premature sexual activity and involvement with drugs.

In Jamaica, a USAID-supported community-wide football competition is helping to break the cycle of violence in a dangerous neighborhood in the country's capital of Kingston.

Regarding the Darfur region of Sudan, U.S. speed skater Joey Cheek donated the \$25,000 he received from the U.S. Olympic Committee for winning a gold medal in the 2006 Winter Olympics to refugees in that area. Cheek's winnings went to the Right to Play organization, which uses sports to advance development, health and peace. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Feb/16-217238.html>).)

ROLE OF SPORTS IN BUILDING SOCIETY LAUDED

The Giving is Winning campaign began with a July 6 ceremony in Guatemala City, where IOC President Jacques Rogge handed over a bag of sportswear to a representative from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

Rogge said that those who have been "ravaged by war and disease, deprived and marginalized" can benefit from the role "sport plays in building a safe, more prosperous and peaceful society."

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, in a June statement, said "many young refugees spend years languishing in bleak camps." The gift of sportswear associated with famous athletes from across the Olympic spectrum is a "tremendous morale-booster -- a sign that the outside world does still care" about the refugees, said Guterres.

Tommy Sithole, IOC director of international cooperation and development, added that the Giving is Winning campaign is "like a moon rock. You cannot put a price tag on it."

Sithole said that "somewhere in this world some unfortunate person living in a refugee camp has not only been provided with something to wear, but more fundamentally with hope."

More information about Giving is Winning is available on the Web sites of the IOC (http://www.olympic.org/uk/news/events/119_session/full_story_uk.asp?id=2205), the U.S. Olympic Committee (http://www.usoc.org/117_52909.htm) and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (<http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/4692299e4.html>).

For more information, see Sports (http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/life_and_culture/sports.html).

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